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New York

President:	Sir Mark Lyall Grant	(United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland)
Members:	Argentina	Mrs. Perceval
	Australia	Mr. Quinlan
	Azerbaijan	Mr. Mehdiyev
	China	Ms. Jiang Hua
	France	Mr. Araud
	Guatemala	Mr. Rosenthal
	Luxembourg	Mr. Maes
	Morocco	Mr. Bouchaara
	Pakistan	Mr. Munir
	Republic of Korea	Mr. Sul Kyung-hoon
	Russian Federation	Mr. Churkin
	Rwanda	Mr. Nduhungirehe
	Togo	Mr. M'Beou
	United States of America	Ms. Rice

Agenda

The situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question

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The meeting was called to order at 3.05 p.m.

The President: As this is the last meeting of the Security Council that will be attended by our colleague Susan Rice, who has been the Permanent Representative of the United States of America to the United Nations for the past four and a half years, I would like to mark the occasion by saying, on behalf of all the members of the Council, that we have greatly appreciated the immense contribution that she has made to the Council's work over that time. On behalf of all of us, I wish her well in her new position as National Security Adviser. As she may be the first National Security Adviser to have been educated at Oxford University, she is certainly extremely well qualified for the job and we wish her well in it.

Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted.

The situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question

The President: Under rule 39 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite Mr. Oscar Fernandez-Taranco, Assistant Secretary-General for Political Affairs, to participate in this meeting.

The Security Council will now begin its consideration of the item on its agenda.

I give the floor to Mr. Fernandez-Taranco.

Mr. Fernandez-Taranco: As the human tragedy in Syria continues to unfold, the whole region is feeling the reverberations, with neighbours, such as Jordan and Lebanon, absorbing much of the humanitarian impact. A resolution is not yet in sight.

Earlier this month, the leaders of the Group of Eight reached an understanding on achieving a political solution on Syria and committed to bringing the Syrian sides to the negotiatingtable. The Secretary-General reiterated his readiness to convene the Geneva Conference on Syria as soon as possible. He further welcomed the announcement of additional contributions of $1.5 billion in humanitarian aid, which is critical to saving lives.

On the same day, in his message to the international meeting in in Beijing in support of Israeli-Palestinian peace, the Secretary-General stressed that resolving the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and safeguarding the two-State solution was no less urgent. The current regional turmoil makes it all the more imperative to build upon the opening created by the diplomatic push by the United States and create a positive momentum towards an Israeli-Palestinian peace that can provide a stabilizing horizon and give hope for the whole region. However, so far there are too few encouraging signs on the prospects for breaking the deadlock. The United Nations has consistently pointed out the risks of prolonged impasse and the consequences of inaction.

The United Nations has welcomed the determined re-engagement of the United States. In March, the United States President underlined that peace was necessary, just and possible. As the international community, we bear a great responsibility in transforming that possibility into reality. Secretary Kerry's several rounds of visits — he announced that he would visit Jerusalem and the region for the fifth time this week — provides the first real opportunity since October 2010 for a serious effort to reach a final status agreement. While United States engagement is central, we are convinced of the need for broader regional and international engagement in support of any peace effort. We also welcome the reaffirmed willingness by Arab States to revive the Arab Peace Initiative. We hope that the Israeli Government will respond positively.

However much the parties need to re-engage in negotiations as the only way to achieve the two-State solution, there must be a substantive and well-prepared framework, as well as a credible timeline, in order for talks to have a chance of success. There is also a need for a conducive environment on the ground, including confidence-building steps. However, while substantive progress is urgently needed, rushing the parties back to the table without having in place the necessary framework and buy-in from both sides would be counter-productive. What is also not needed are unhelpful statements with regard to the prospects for the two-State solution. Rather, progress necessitates serious political commitments by both leaders — Prime Minister Netanyahu and President Abbas — who should show statesmanship, recognize a partner in each other and finally negotiate and achieve a two-State solution, which is a vision that they have both agreed on. However narrow, the current window of opportunity should not be lost.

The de-facto settlement restraint observed earlier this spring has seen signs of unravelling. The Secretary-General has been particularly troubled by

reports that planning for hundreds of housing units in the settlement of Itamar, deep in the West Bank, has advanced to the next stage, as is also the case in the outpost of Bruchin. We also note with disappointment that, according to data released by the Israeli Central Bureau of Statistics, during the first quarter of 2013 there were 865 starts in construction of housing units in settlements, representing a 176% increase compared to the equivalent period in 2012 — a seven-year record. Those are unhelpful decisions that undermine progress towards the two-State solution. The Secretary-General reiterates that settlement activity is illegal, and calls on Israel to abide by its commitments under international law and the road map.

A new Palestinian Cabinet was sworn in on 6 June under the leadership of Rami Hamdallah to carry on the administration of the affairs of State until a national consensus Government is formed. However, in an apparent sign of disagreement about certain competencies, Prime Minister Hamdallah tendered his resignation on 20 June, but stayed on as caretaker until a successor was named. That creates renewed uncertainty for a Government still relying considerably on international support and facing a critical period ahead. The United Nations looks forward to continuing to work with the Government of Palestine and President Abbas in support of their state-building agenda and ongoing efforts aimed at a resumption of meaningful peace negotiations. The continued viability of the Palestinian Authority remains a core interest of the United Nations.

One fiscal factor fuelling concern in that regard is the Palestinian Authority's total Government debt of reportedly $4.2 billion and its deficit, which had reached $612 million by the end of May. Donor support has decreased over the past years, and the United Nations is concerned about possible further cuts. Continued donor funding is essential to allow the Palestinian Government to tighten fiscal policy in a manner that does not harm the private sector or essential social spending.

Important meetings took place during and on the margins of the meeting of the World Economic Forum at the Dead Sea in Jordan last month. The "Breaking the impasse" initiative was unveiled, which we welcome as a serious expression by influential business leaders and public opinion from both sides of their wish for a two-State solution and an urgent appeal to their leaders to realize it now. At the same event, Secretary Kerry announced a large-scale initiative intended to spur economic growth through private investment in the West Bank and Gaza. Those are hopeful signs. However, it is absolutely crucial that progress be made on the political track, absent which sustained growth and private investment will remain elusive and Palestinian accomplishments on the state-building agenda will be difficult to sustain.

The United Nations continues to help to address the humanitarian and development needs of Palestinians in Area C, where lifting Israeli restrictions on Palestinian movement, access to land and water, planning and construction would unleash the growth potential. We continue to engage the Israeli Government on a series infrastructure projects in Area C, and we are in the process of securing funding for works supporting the agricultural sector. To more effectively address development needs in Area C, it is imperative that Israeli authorities authorize the 32 plans that hve been submitted for approval, some of which have been pending since June 2010.

Tensions on the ground are also mounting. Violence between Palestinians and settlers continued in the West Bank. A total of five Palestinians, including one woman, were injured by settlers, while six settlers, including four women, were injured by Palestinian stone-throwing. An Israeli bus was shot at yesterday near Nablus, without resulting in injuries. Settler violence against Palestinian property under the so called price-tag attacks also ipcreased sharply, resulting in extensive material damage. Such attacks also targeted Christian sites, including the Dormition Abbey in Jerusalem and the Jaffa Orthodox cemetery.

Between 14 and 16 June, Israeli right-wing activists reportedly beat and injured three Palestinian women in West Jerusalem, including a 75-year-old. On 17 June, the tires of 28 cars were punctured in Abu Gosh, a village inside Israel that is also populated by Arab citizens of Israel, and racist slogans were painted on walls. Prime Minister Netanyahu publicly protested such acts as running counter to Jewish commandments and the values of the people of Israel. The day before, the Israeli Government strengthened the State's law-enforcement ability to combat price-tag attacks by declaring their perpetrators an "illegal association". It is hoped that this measure will contribute to preventing such attacks, which must not go unpunished.

The security situation remained comparable to the previous reporting period, and security coordination

between Palestinian and Israeli security forces continued despite some clashes. Israeli security forces conducted a total of 457 search-and-arrest operations in the occupied West Bank, resulting in 162 Palestinians injured, including 58 children and eight women. Two members of the Israeli security forces were also injured. Four-hundred and fifty-five Palestinians were arrested by Israeli security forces, including a Hamas Palestinian Legislative Council member on 6 June in Ramallah. On 11 June, Prime Minister Netanyahu said that Israel has foiled five suicide attacks since the start of the year.

The majority of injuries resulted from clashes during Palestinian protests in the occupied West Bank, including against the barrier, which deviates from the Green Line in contravention of the advisory opinion of the International Court of Justice (A/ES-10/273). Demolitions of Palestinian property in Area C and in East Jerusalem continued, albeit at a slower pace, with a total of 24 structures demolished, leading to the displacement of 55 Palestinians, including 23 children.

Relative calm returned to Gaza this month, until it was shattered during the night of 23 June when six rockets were fired from Gaza into Israel, reportedly by Islamic Jihad. Two were intercepted by the Iron Dome missile defence system, and four landed in southern Israel without causing injuries or damage. In response, Israel conducted three airstrikes into Gaza yesterday, targeting sites allegedly linked to weapons-storage and rocket launching, causing no casualties. Israel also closed the Kerem Shalom and Erez crossings for Palestinians. We condemn rocket fire into civilian areas and urge Israeli restraint. All must abide by their obligations under international humanitarian law to protect civilians.

We remain concerned about the state of human rights and freedoms in Gaza. That includes our deep concern about four death sentences passed by military courts in Gaza, between 9 May and 20 June, and two executions carried out on 22 June, outside of the Palestinian legal framework. We call on de facto authorities in Gaza to refrain from carrying out further executions.

Despite our ongoing efforts, we unfortunately must report further encroachment on freedoms in Gaza, namely, increasing impediments on humanitarian operations. Along with inappropriate taxation requests, exit restrictions have recently been imposed by the de facto authorities on Palestinian staff of the United Nations, non-governmental organizations and other organizations, to the point where some staff have not been able to leave Gaza. We call on the de facto authorities to rescind these restrictions, and hope that a solution can be found quickly.

Such measures impair the delivery of much-needed assistance to Palestinians, as does continuing violence. The only possible way forward is the full implementation of the ceasefire understanding reached on 21 November under Egyptian auspices, which calls for calm and the full lifting of the closure. We urge the parties to adhere to its terms to preserve advances and prospects to implement resolution 1860 (2009) in full. Our immediate goals continued to include extending the fishing limit to at least eight nautical miles, allowing the entry of construction material and permitting exports to Israel and transfers from Gaza to the West Bank, while we continue to carry out sizable programmes that address pressing needs.

In that regard, I would note that preliminary results of a joint United Nations survey indicate that food insecurity affects some 1.6 million Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza, and has increased to include 34 per cent of households in 2012.

Against such a concerning backdrop, I would nevertheless like to highlight a moment of joy that lifted the spirits of Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza alike, when on 22 June a young Gazan refugee, Mohammad Assaf, won the "Arab Idol" televised song contest, watched by millions throughout the region and beyond. Following his victory, Mr. Assaf was named as goodwill ambassador to the Palestinian diaspora by President Abbas and as the first Regional Youth Ambassador for Palestine Refugees by the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East.

Turning to Syria, let me emphasize that the overall situation continues to deteriorate as a result of continued violent military confrontation. Direct involvement by Hizbullah fighters inside Syria has given new momentum to the Syrian Government's military approach and contributed to sectarian and political tensions throughout the region. Statements of increased military support to both sides in the conflict only promise further escalation. The Secretary-General has repeatedly stressed his opposition to the transfer of arms and fighters to either side inside Syria.

In the meantime, the conflict is taking a heavy toll on the civilian population in Syria. More than 93,000 people have been reported killed. Civilians continued to flee to neighbouring and regional countries, where the number of refugees from Syria is now close to 1.7 million. United Nations agencies estimate that there are more than 6.8 million people in need of humanitarian assistance inside Syria, including more than 3 million children. The situation of Palestine refugees in Syria also remains of the utmost concern. More than 60,000 have fled to neighbouring Lebanon and Jordan. There are urgent needs in all sectors of humanitarian assistance.

The Independent Commission of Inquiry continued to document serious violations of international human rights law and international humanitarian law, and reiterated in its report of 4 June (A/HRC/23/58) that war crimes, crimes against humanity and gross human rights violations continued apace.

The Secretary-General has insisted that there is no military solution to the conflict. Only a political solution can bring the violence and the suffering of the Syrian people to an end. The Secretary-General continues his engagement with Member States and regional organizations in building on the diplomatic opportunity provided by the understanding reached between Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov and United States Secretary of State John Kerry on 7 May in Moscow. In that context, Joint Special Representative Lakhdar Brahimi and Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs Jeffrey Feltman are exploring ways to ensure the success of the Geneva Conference on Syria, which would allow the Syrian parties to jointly determine the full implementation of the Geneva communiqué (S/2012/523, annex) of 30 June 2012. To that effect, they met with Russian and United States representatives in Geneva today.

With regard to the alleged use of chemical weapons, the United Nations mission to investigate allegations of the use of chemical weapons in the Syrian Arab Republic has so far remained unable to conduct its fact-finding mission inside Syria due to the lack of authorization for acess on the part of the Syrian Government. Several additional allegations of the use of chemical weapons have been brought to the Secretary-General's attention by Member States. The mission will continue to monitor developments and collect available information. The head of mission, Ake Sellström, has visited some capitals and is currently pursuing other options for fact-finding activities outside of Syria, including in neighbouring States.

The Council was briefed in detail last week on the tense situation with regard to the United Nations Disengagement Observer Force (UNDOF) area of operations in the Golan, which we continue to monitor with concern. We have repeatedly called for all violations of the Disengagement Agreement to cease and have urged the parties strictly to abide by their obligations. We remain fully committed to UNDOF's mandate and are actively looking for replacements for the departing Austrian troops.

The negative impact of the conflict in Syria on Lebanon has been more sharply evident in recent weeks. On 25 May, Hizbullah Secretary-General Hassan Nasrallah acknowledged Hizbullah's role in the fighting alongside the Government in Syria, while other Lebanese elements are also reported to be providing support to the other side. Fighters from other countries are also reported to be participating in the conflict. Threats of retaliation from Syrian opposition elements and calls by Lebanese Salafi sheikhs for jihad in Syria highlight the very real danger of the threat of a spread of the Syrian conflict to Lebanon. President Sleiman reiterated his calls for all concerned to adhere to the Baabda Declaration. The Secretary-General expressed deep concern about Hizbullah's increased participation in the fighting in Syria, and reiterated how important it was that all Lebanese leaders prevent a dangerous spillover of the conflict in Lebanon and adhere to the Baabda Declaration, as essential to Lebanon's stability and security. On 20 June, President Sleiman called on Hizbullah fighters to return to Lebanon.

During the reporting period, more than 60 shells and rockets were launched from Syria into Lebanon, causing one fatality and a dozen injuries. On 26 May, two rockets were fired into Shiite neighbourhoods in the southern suburbs of Beirut, wounding four people. On 21 June, another rocket was fired into the southern Beirut district of Alley. On 5 and 12 June, Syrian army helicopters fired missiles into the Arsal region of Lebanon. The Lebanese Armed Forces stated that their units in that area had taken defensive measures necessary to react immediately to any further violation. On 18 June, in a letter for transmission to the President of the Security Council, President Sleiman protested the conflicting Syrian parties' infringement of Lebanon's sovereignty and territorial integrity.

The violence in Tripoli, which started on 19 May, continued, causing 36 deaths, including those of two members of the Army, and wounding 200 others. Tensions in the northern Beka'a Valley are high, with attacks and clashes on 27 May and 6 June that left three Lebanese soldiers and two gunmen dead. Attacks in Arsal on 11 and 16 June resulted in five fatalities. In a serious development, violence also erupted in the southern city of Sidon, where on 23 and 24 June armed clashes between supporters of a Salafist cleric and the Lebanese Armed Forces left at least 16 soldiers dead and 15 others wounded. That includes at least two soldiers killed in a related attack on Army checkpoints at the entrances to the Ain Al-Hilweh Palestinian refugee camp outside Sidon. The Secretary-General condemned the attacks on the Lebanese Armed Forces, stressing the importance of fully respecting the authority of the State and its institutions, particularly the Lebanese Armed Forces, under the leadership of President Sleiman. He also reminded all concerned in Lebanon of their responsibility to avoid conflict and uphold the principles of mutual respect and coexistence.

On 31 May, a majority of the Parliament, from both political blocs, voted to extend its mandate by 17 months, thereby postponing the elections scheduled for 16 June until a date to be set before November 2014. Appeals against the extension were put before the Constitutional Council, but due to the lack of a quorum the Council was not able to consider them. The extension of the Parliament's mandate is therefore confirmed. Prime Minister-designate Tammam Salam is resuming consultations aimed at forming a new Government.

The situation in the area of operations of the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) along the Blue Line remained broadly quiet but fragile. UNIFIL was able to control some tension between Lebanese civilians and troops of the Israel Defense Forces along the Hasbani/Wazzani river area. Israeli violations of Lebanese airspace continued on an almost daily basis and in some instances intensified, notably between 3 and 5 May.

The Middle East is living in dangerous and tragic days, as the scourge of war is once again destroying lives and burying hopes. It is a trying period for the United Nations, and our collective ability to live up to the values and principles of the Charter is being put to a hard test. But however difficult the task, the Security Council and the United Nations at large cannot give up or let a sense of collective impotence erode our sense of responsibility. Resolving conflict and finding a way towards peaceful coexistence and mutual respect for all is possible. But it requires courageous and mutual compromises at the national, regional and international levels, and a commitment to settling conflicts through peaceful means, not war or violence. That is true in Syria as it is elsewhere. It is crucial that all act responsibly and contribute to reversing the negative dynamics at play in the region. The current situation of unresolved conflict and prolonged occupation in the West Bank and Gaza is the cause of much suffering on the Palestinian side, but it is no good for Israel either. We at the United Nations are deeply convinced that achieving a two-State solution, ending the occupation begun in 1967 and ending the conflict, as envisaged in the relevant resolutions of the Council, are in the best interests of both Israelis and Palestinians. Leaders have a choice to make, and a responsibility to their people and future generations. The United Nations will continue to do all it can to help in the search for peace and the realization of the universal and legitimate rights of all people in the region.

The President: I thank Mr. Fernandez-Taranco for his briefing.

I now invite Council members to informal consultations to continue our discussion on the subject.

The meeting rose at 3.30 p.m.